

# Jr. Cast Iron Cookoff



The menu: Duck breast with brandied cherry sauce, foie gras wild rice, and a whole grain berry stack for dessert. Sound like something you'd eat at a fancy, high-priced restaurant? Think again. That was the winning menu from the 2015 Jr. Cast Iron Cook-Off prepared by Pro-Start and agriculture students at Tucker County High School.

"What's great about the Jr. Cast Iron Cook-Off is we're pushing the sustainability of using local produce. The students get to create the product from the ground up and utilize it in a creative dish they make and present to the judges," said Brian Covell, the Pro-Start Chef/Instructor at the Monongalia County Technical Education Center.

Last year Covell was the Pro-Start instructor at Tucker County High. The tasty meal he and his students cooked up during the competition won over the judges for the top prize as well as Best Use of Cast Iron.

"What was great about our team is that we grew all our own products. Our vegetables came from the school green house. Our duck breast was sourced from a local farm. We brought that food with us and used it in the Jr. Cast Iron Cook-Off," stressed Covell.

Up to eight teams will participate in this year's Jr. Cook-Off set for February 5. Each team has just one hour, cast iron cookware, and two butane burners to create a delicious and nutritious meal

Keri Kennedy, the coordinator for the WV Department of Education's Office of Child Nutrition, said the competition gives the students a chance to showcase how local grown food can be used in school menus.

"School meals often get a bad rap. We hope these menus give a different perspective."

Courtney Coetzee is a member of the Pocahontas County High School Pro-Start team. She competed in the 2015 cook-off. Her team's menu consisted of venison stew, ramp cornbread, and buckwheat pancakes for dessert. They took home the award for Best Teamwork.

“We came up with the menu. It’s based on school nutrition guidelines. We were thinking about the area we live in. A lot of people eat venison and ramps,” she said. “We put in a lot of practice, staying after school, constantly going over our recipes. It takes teamwork and time management to compete.”

“This competition prepares our students for work in the real world,” said Covell. “They’re learning skills like communicating, cooperation, initiative, planning, problem solving.”

You won’t be seeing foie gras wild rice popping up in your kids’ school cafeteria any time soon. However, Kennedy said, the Cast Iron Cook-Off gets students and adults thinking about non-traditional menus that can be sourced locally and then served up as child-friendly, delicious meals.

You can read more about the Jr. Cast Iron Cook-Off at <http://castironcookoff.org/>.